RELATING FORESTS

REPORT

COVER PHOTO BY
LINNEA SYVERSEN

Colophon

Relating Forests
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I. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT BASICS

NOTE FOR THE READER:

Our work is based on experience, an experience that lies beyond words and numbers. Any attempt to describe the dense, interwoven tapestry of experiences and insights that have emerged throughout the project will always be incomplete. The opacity of experience and of the experimental field is inherent to our place-based and body-based practices, which happen in the moment.

We will attempt to convey what happened with words and images, inevitably fragmentary. The difficulty of translating this experience into language highlights what Édouard Glissant termed the "right to opacity": the acknowledgment that not everything must be transparent, translatable, or representable. There is a residue, a surplus of experience that eludes capture. **This documentation is a trace, a fragment, and an invitation. It is meant to point toward the experience, acknowledging the gap that always exists between experience and representation, a gap that can never be closed.** Paradoxically, this gap contains the essence of what we do: a practice that resists instrumental appropriation and thereby unfolds its transformative power.

For this reason you will find different ways of expressing our experience in this report, ranging from formal descriptions to personal reflections, poems, interviews, pictures, description and mind maps. This variety reflects the process of our work, in which we tried to embrace and dance with the complexity of the forest through a multitude of approaches.

In the appendix you will find definitions of key terms. Those are marked with a * in the main text.

I.1 Initial Project Outline

In times of climate crisis and advancing species extinction, the question of our relationship with the more-than-human world is becoming increasingly urgent. “relating forests” offers an artistic space to reflect on this relationship and develop new forms of understanding and connection.

It demonstrates how artistic practices can build new bridges of understanding to the world of plants and animals, thereby contributing to a more sustainable and empathetic approach to co-existing with the more-than-human.

The initiative, supported by TheatreFragile (Germany), NOBA (Norway), and Culture Eco-Actives (France) under the banner of CreativeEurope, unfolds across various European regions, each with specific natural environments: the region of Teutoburg Forest, the Nordic landscape of Norway and the French Alps.

“Relating forests” pursues an interdisciplinary approach that interweaves artistic research with myths and modern perspectives on nature, guided by the core question of how humans can reshape and deepen their relationship with the living world of plants and animals. Selected cultural narratives and rituals form the foundation of the project – from Sámi myths to European mask traditions and Fairy Tales, Myths, and Popular Traditional Practices in Middle Germany.

The inclusion of different age groups in the workshop within the project – from elementary school classes to teenagers and adults – produced a cross-generational dialogue about ecological connections and artistic forms of expression.

I.2 Participants and Disciplines

"relating forests" brings together artists and experts from 3 European countries, whose diverse backgrounds and experiences have led to exciting interdisciplinary learning. During the development process somatic practices, story-telling and masked theatre were used. In the background the artists contributed their expertise in cultural management and production.

In public workshops and presentations, the artists experienced the combination of mask play, acting and choreography. Storytelling, outdoor education, soundwork and philosophy came together to provide a transformative experience and space for resonance*. This interdisciplinary composition enables a multi-layered artistic approach to the theme of forest and ecology, combining performative, narrative, participatory, and research-based methods.

TheatreFragile (Germany), with its founders **Marianne Cornil** and **Luzie Ackers,** forms the artistic heart of the project. Marianne Cornil is a mask performer and develops characteristic voice collages from interviews with those affected. She is responsible for the overall conceptual direction of this project. Under Bruno Latour at Sciences Po Paris she deepened her artistic research as part of the master's programme "experimentation politic & art" (SPEAP). Luzie Ackers works as a physical performer in mask theater and mask creation and has developed over 120 contemporary masks since 2007. She contributes her expertise in the field of transformative mask performance and is responsible for design. Together with Marianne Cornil, they are the co-artistic directors of the company.

Marianne Döller brings vital production and organizational skills to the project as creative producer. With her background in acting, she has a deep understanding of artistic processes. Her master's degree in culture and media management from the HfMT Hamburg (2020–2023) qualifies her particularly well for the complex requirements of international cultural projects. She has been working with TheatreFragile since May 2023 and is responsible for fundraising and the general production organization of "relating forests."

Cultures Eco-Actives (France) is represented by **Anne Bouchon**, who brings extensive experience in managing international cultural projects. Since 1996, she has been managing multi-partner projects for governments and NGOs and has already managed two Europe Creative projects. She is responsible for process observation, documentation, and communication, including a specific focus on participant feedback, and brings her many years of experience in nature conservation and ecological responsibility to the project. She heads the organization Cultures Eco-Actives.
Anne-Claire Dromzée also comes from France and has been working as a storyteller for 10 years and a mountain guide for 20 years. Since 2014, she has been developing solo performances and storytelling hikes about birds, plants, trees, and the connection between living beings and stories in order to link living beings with stories on-site. In 2020 she founded the Compagnie Entre-Deux together with Jean-Benoît Blandin, which promotes storytelling in various artistic forms of expression such as music, dance, and singing.

NOBA (Norway) contributes both artistic and scientific perspectives. **Rebekka Sæter** works as a choreographer, interdisciplinary artist, and outdoor educator at the intersection of body, movement, place, and narrative. Her artistic practice is deeply rooted in physical engagement with places – she uses movement and choreography as a means to reveal complex relationships between 'between humans, places and living beings'. Sæter develops innovative working strategies that integrate ecology directly into performance, drawing on her extensive interdisciplinary experience in facilitation, outdoor teaching, and art research.

Solveig Arnesen is CEO of Vitenparken ('CEO of Vitenparken Science Center, home of Norwegian BioArt Arena), home of NOBA. For seven years, Vitenparken has been exploring the relationships between science, art, sustainability, and climate change through a variety of projects. Solveig was instrumental in developing the idea for NOBA and has since been one of the driving forces behind its development. She has a broad background in cultural project production, as well as entrepreneurship and business development at the intersection of art, science, and green, sustainable economics.

Nora S. Vaage, senior researcher at NOBA and professor of art and media studies at NTNU and Nord University, contributes theoretical grounding through her research on more-than-human care and environmental media. She will mobilize her large international network of researchers and artists and contribute to the written dissemination of the project.

MARIANNE
PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

ANNE-CLAIRE
PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

ANNE
PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

LUZIE
PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

REBEKKA
PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

MARIANNE
PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

I.3 Questioning and Objectives
(final online meeting)

With "relating forests" our aim was to question and revisit the relationship between humans and the non-human, particularly our relationship with the forest.

At the beginning of the project, we formulated the following questions and thought regarding our relationship with the forest:

What kind of relationship with the forest are we aiming to establish? For what purpose? Our goal was to enable participants to experience transformative relationships with the forest, as opposed to the Western cultural subject-object relationship, through practices that engage the body, imagination and community.

Rather than taking an abstract approach, we immersed ourselves in the places where we encounter forests, including their cultures, histories, and living ecosystems with the goal of creating a contemporary ritual experience that generates attention and resonance* in the forest. A means to reach this goal was the attempt to facilitate within the participants a state of "resonance*" in the forest, resonance* as described by Hartmut Rosa as 'the relationships of the world of the self in which the subject and the world are mutually affected and transformed.'

One of the ensuing tasks is to detect in the participants' feedback the emotions, stories, words or attitudes signs of a state of resonance*.

Another means is working with our imagination and its potential to help us sense our interdependence with other living beings: biological interdependence, interdependence for survival, being part of the living world* to meet our vital needs with respect. The challenge is to detect what is problematic in the stories we receive (through myth, fairytales and other cultural communal story telling…) and rework them through art.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND CHRONOLOGY

II.1 Preparatory Phase (online)

(final online meeting)

Project Development and Initial Phase

TheatreFragile, the initiator of this project, had already explored the themes of climate change, global transformations, and their urgency in two previous productions “Are you ready?” and “Wie du in den Wald hineinrufst…”. STILL, the most recent piece of the mask theatre company, explores the performativity of plants and the connections to the “more-than-human.” With this impetus, TheatreFragile began searching for partners in order to deepen and enrich the research with international perspectives. TheatreFragile came across NOBA, the Norwegian Bioarts Arena, and the institution Cultures-Eco Actives in the south of France, both institutions dedicated to the joint development of culture and environment. The collaborative work began in September 2023 when TheatreFragile, NOBA, and Culture Eco-Actives came together to develop a joint project concept A desire to engage with myths, fairy tales, cultural imaginaries*, and mask rituals was sparked by this new collaboration, which brought together four artists from different artistic fields and backgrounds. Submitted to CreativeEurope in early 2024, the application received approval in the summer 2024, setting the stage for an ambitious artistic and ecological exploration across three European countries.

Due to the large geographical distance between the partner organisations, a workflow including regular online meetings was established. These meetings focused on sharing artistic works and facilitated the preparation of artistic activities and online events, providing a common groundwork for the project participants. The three laboratories took place at the respective partner organisations in the Southern Alps in France, central Germany and southern Oslo in Norway.

Theoretical Foundations: Spring 2025 Lecture Series

The first online lecture series in Spring 2024 provided essential conceptual frameworks for the project and also lso expanded audience reach from the different countries. The public event was designed for an audience of scientific and artistic experts, as well as interested individuals from the extended network of the partner organizations.

Catherine Persing, a theatre scholar whose research focuses on the relationship between humans and the more-than-human in contemporary theatre, opened the series with a presentation on myths and their significance in our relationship with the more-than-human, exploring how ancient narratives continue to shape contemporary ecological consciousness.

Professor Harald Gaski contributed insights into Sámi relationships with the more-than-human through myths and stories, revealing indigenous perspectives on living* in reciprocal connection with the natural world. His contribution encouraged us to engage in dialogue with the place. For instance by asking for permission to work in a place or to include one specific plant or tree in our work, as Sami people ask for instance the trees before cutting them.

Photographer Yannick Cormier complemented this with an examination of mask rituals in European paganism, demonstrating how masks have historically functioned as mediators between humans and the living world* and underlining the vitality of rituals.

II.2 The Three Laboratories: In Situ Research and Communication

First Residency: French Alps, May 2025

On May 24, 2024, the partners met in person for the first time in the French Alps for three intensive days designed by Anne Bouchon from Culture Eco-Actives. The residency combined collaborative artistic work, public engagement, and educational outreach.

For the first shared workshop adult participants could experience two distinct workshops: a mask-theatre workshop led by Luzie Ackers and Marianne Cornil and a participatory storytelling walk guided by the story-teller Anne-Claire Dromzee. These sessions allowed participants to explore embodied practices of connection with the more-than-human. The walk also provided an opportunity to share stories and imaginings about the forest.

After a preparatory day the four artists developed workshops for two primary school classes in the forest that integrated performative elements and practical exercises. Framed by stories told by the children themselves, these sessions helped young participants discover different languages and cultures through direct contact with the forest environment. At the end of the workshop, the pupils shared their stories about the forest, which were recorded by one of the artists.

PHOTO BY
CAMILLE FOUCAULT

PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

PHOTO BY
CAMILLE FOUCAULT

PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

Second Residency: Teutoburg Forest, July 2025

In July 2025, the project moved to Detmold in the region of the Teutoburg Forest for three intensive days of exploration and creation, designed and organzied by Luzie Ackers and Marianne Cornil. At the open-air museum (Freilichtmuseum Detmold), the historian and museum director Gefion Apel guided the group through Westphalian culture, including fairy tales, superstitions and traditional perceptions of the living world*.

Theatre scholar Catherin Persing delivered a second inspiring lecture focusing on the relationship between plants, people, and art. The discussion explored how artistic practices can open new pathways for understanding and connecting with the plant world, complemented by embodied experiences like somatic work around the association between lungs ("tree-bronchial-tree") and branchial network.

An entire day was dedicated to artistic research in the forest, where the four artists involved in the project explored the landscape, tested methodologies, and deepened their understanding of each other's practices. Rebekka Saeter introduced somatic exercises that connect the textures of the body, such as muscle, skin, and bone, with space, ground, and plants. These exercises support an expanded perception of the more-than-human. Ann-Claire Dromzee complemented this through her narrative art with exercises that encouraged collective storytelling and the invention of narratives, beginning with individual imagination and then moving into shared, collective imagining. Marianne Cornil and Luzie Ackers introduced various exercises from mask play and sound work connected with storytelling, as well as physical engagement within the forest space, to foster connection. This approach will be explained in the further chapter.

This research led to a four-hour workshop with 20 teenagers on the last day. Using masks, sensory exploration, and multilingual stories and songs, participants investigated the more-than-human. The workshop concluded with a public presentation sharing the experiences and discoveries of the day.

PHOTOS BY MAX KRAUSE

PHOTO BY THEATREFRAGILE

PHOTO BY LIMMEA SYVERSEN

Final Residency: Ås, Norway, October 2025

The project reached its conclusion with four intense days in Ås, Norway, organized by Rebekka Sæter from NOBA, Vitenparken. Participants stayed in a typical Norwegian cabin, creating an immersive environment for the final phase of work.

The first day featured three lectures that wove together scientific, mythological, and philosophical perspectives. Arborist Jeroen Scheepmarker spoke about trees on the grounds of the University of Life Sciences where Vitenparken is located. Historian Hårvard Steinsholt explored local Norwegian myths, while eco-philosopher Martin Lee Müller offered a philosophical prelude around the campfire, creating an atmosphere of contemplation and connection.

The second day deepened the artistic exploration, as sound artist Lajla Buer Storli and eco-philosopher Austra Apsite introduced the group to folk music and the voice, integrating philosophy and myths within the forest setting. These sessions connected traditional vocal practices with contemporary ecological awareness.

For the third and final presentation of the project approximately 35 visitors participated in a performative forest wandering at dusk. This magical experience in the semi-darkness provided a powerful conclusion to the project, bringing together all the artistic, philosophical, and ecological threads explored throughout the journey.

From the initial research phase in September 2023 to the final performative event in Norway in October 2025, “relating forests” created a rich tapestry of encounters between artistic practice, traditional knowledge, and ecological awareness.

PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

PHOTO BY LIMMEA SYVERSEN

Final Online Event – November 17, 2025

The final event took place online via Zoom with live translation between English and French. The four artists presented to a broad audience of artists, scientists and interested parties who had gathered around the project and been invited via various networks. The project reports from the three workshops in France, Germany, and Norway were showcased. Focus areas included the artistic methods (mask work, storytelling, sensory forest experiences) and the evaluation results, presented by Anne Bouchon,which showed significant changes in participants' perception of and relationship to the forest. The presentation concluded with an in-depth Q&A session.

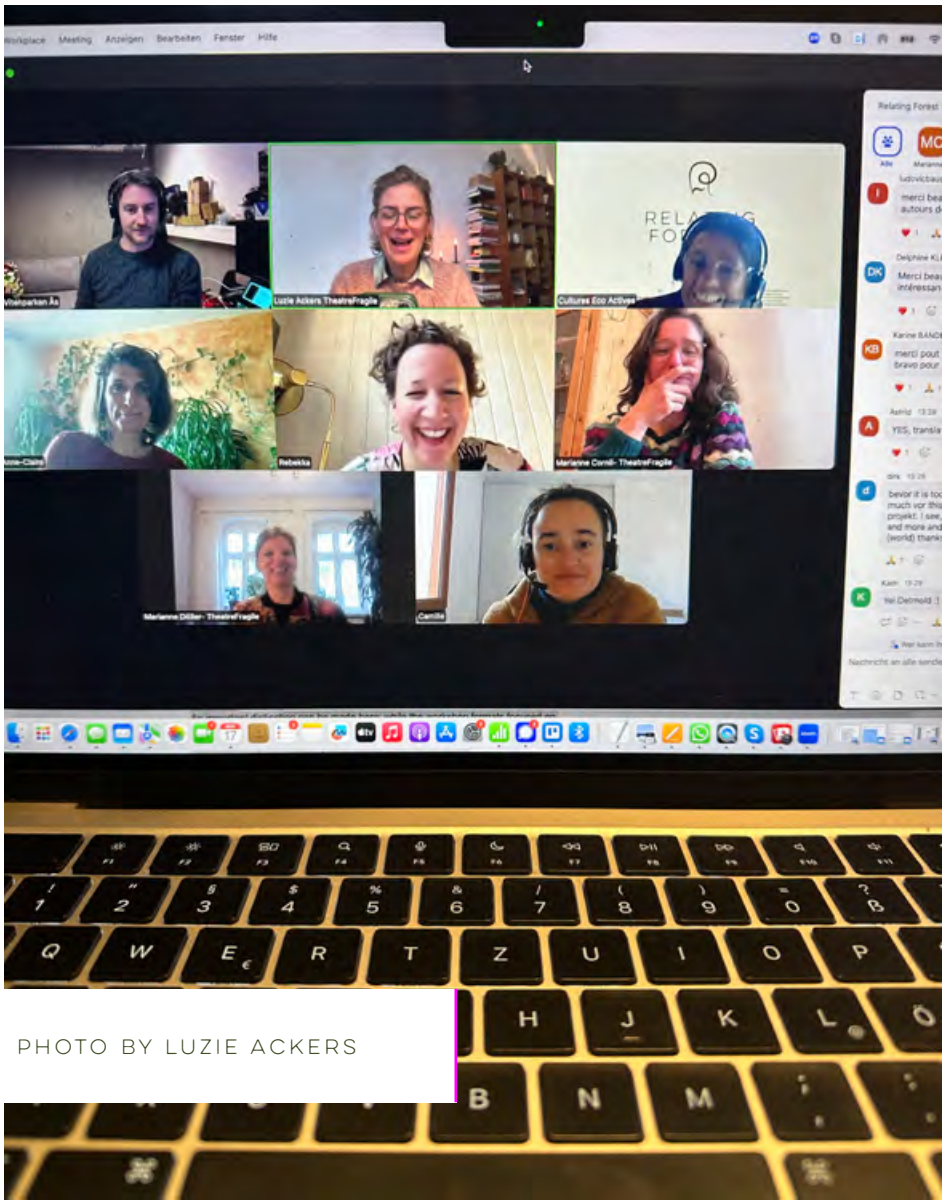


PHOTO BY LUZIE ACKERS

2025
MARCH 13
Online Seminar with Theatre Scholar Catherin Persing (GER)
APRIL 8
Online seminar with photographer Yannick Cormier (FRA) and Professor of Sámi Literature Harald Gaski (NOR)
MAY 21–23
Workshop in France (Cultures Eco Actives)
JULY 17–19
Workshop in Germany (Theatre Fragile)
OCTOBER 8–10
Workshop in Norway (NOBA)
OCTOBER
Presentation of Project Findings

III. NARRATIVES OF / IN THE FOREST

III.1 What Do We Call a Forest? Ecosystems and Cultural Imaginaries*

In "relating forests" the term "forest" is understood as going far beyond a purely biological description, conceiving it as a complex interaction between ecosystems and the human imagination.

What we call "forest" is not a static concept, but rather a multidimensional place that emerges from the mutual influence between humans and their environment. The forest exists both as a physical reality and as a projection space, a surface onto which we project our ideas, desires, myths, and expectations.

Forests serve as a backdrop for individual and collective images. What we project onto the forest depends on our cultural context. In Germany, the image of an "orderly" forest is marked by traditions from the Romantic period. In Norway, the forest is strongly associated with myths of underground beings and trolls and the concept of "Friluftsliv", that promotes closeness to nature, physical well-being, and mental balance through year-round outdoor activities. In France, the forest is historically marked by rational planning and state control, shaped by royal forests and later by centralized forestry administration: this has produced an image of the forest as a regulated and productive space, standing in tension with more recent perceptions of the forest as a site of leisure, heritage, and ecological concern.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

PHOTO BY
CAMILLE FOUCAULT

III.2 Cultural and Geographical Differences

Throughout "relating forests" we focused on the contrasting ecosystems in the French Alps, central Germany and south of Oslo in Norway, ranging from rich biodiversity to declining monocultures. It was this diversity that made it possible to recognise the 'forest' as a multidimensional concept.

France: Mountain Forests and Spring Meadows

In the French Southern Alps we discovered a diverse landscape.

The Boscodon Forest, part of the Écrins National Park system in the Southern Alps, where the workshop with adults took place, is the oldest forest in the territory, one of the few dating back more than two centuries. The area we visited was preserved from deforestation from livestock overgrazing and logging for fuelwood between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, thanks to its belonging to an ecclesiastical domain. In the Boscodon forest we discovered a place for both research and storytelling. This forest ecosystem remains closely monitored under long-term observation with a specific focus on biodiversity in mountain owls and mosses. Shrouded in local myths, such as the "Bear of Boscodon," this forest combines scientific precision with mythology, as well as visiting hospitality. On the shady side of the mountain the forest revealed a high density of living beings along the trails, including wild orchids.

The other part of the project took place in a steeper, drier and rockier section of the forest with more direct sunlight. Large-scale public reforestation efforts of the 19th century testify to the strong local cultural link to the forest as a resource for heating and construction.

Germany:

The forest in the Teutoburger Wald region of Germany offered a strong ecological contrast to the other sites. This area of the old “Beller Wald” forest, which has been cultivated and used since the 19th century, consists of beech trees interspersed with spruce and mixed woods. There were visible consequences of storms and bark beetle infestation, resulting from climate stress.

Due to these circumstances some of the participating artists perceived this beech-planted forest as ‘calm, dark, orderly and alien’. The barren forest floor beneath the large beech trees and picture of forest devastation led to reflections on climate change and the loss of biodiversity. This forest necessitated a different form of artistic attention.

The workshop on the last day of the laboratory was located in a small area of the forest used for educational purposes by the NABU organization, one of our cooperating partners. NABU is Germany’s oldest and largest environmental association, advocating worldwide for biodiversity.

The approach to forests in Germany has historically been characterised by systematic forest management. The Teutoburg Forest also has nationalistic symbolic significance since the 19th century, due to the German myth of Arminius’ battle located there, making it a highly mythologized and ideologically charged cultural space. It serves as a projection screen for national identity, regional folklore, and deep-rooted romantic longings. Working in this landscape meant confronting not only ecological damage, but also cultural narratives of domination over nature, among other issues.

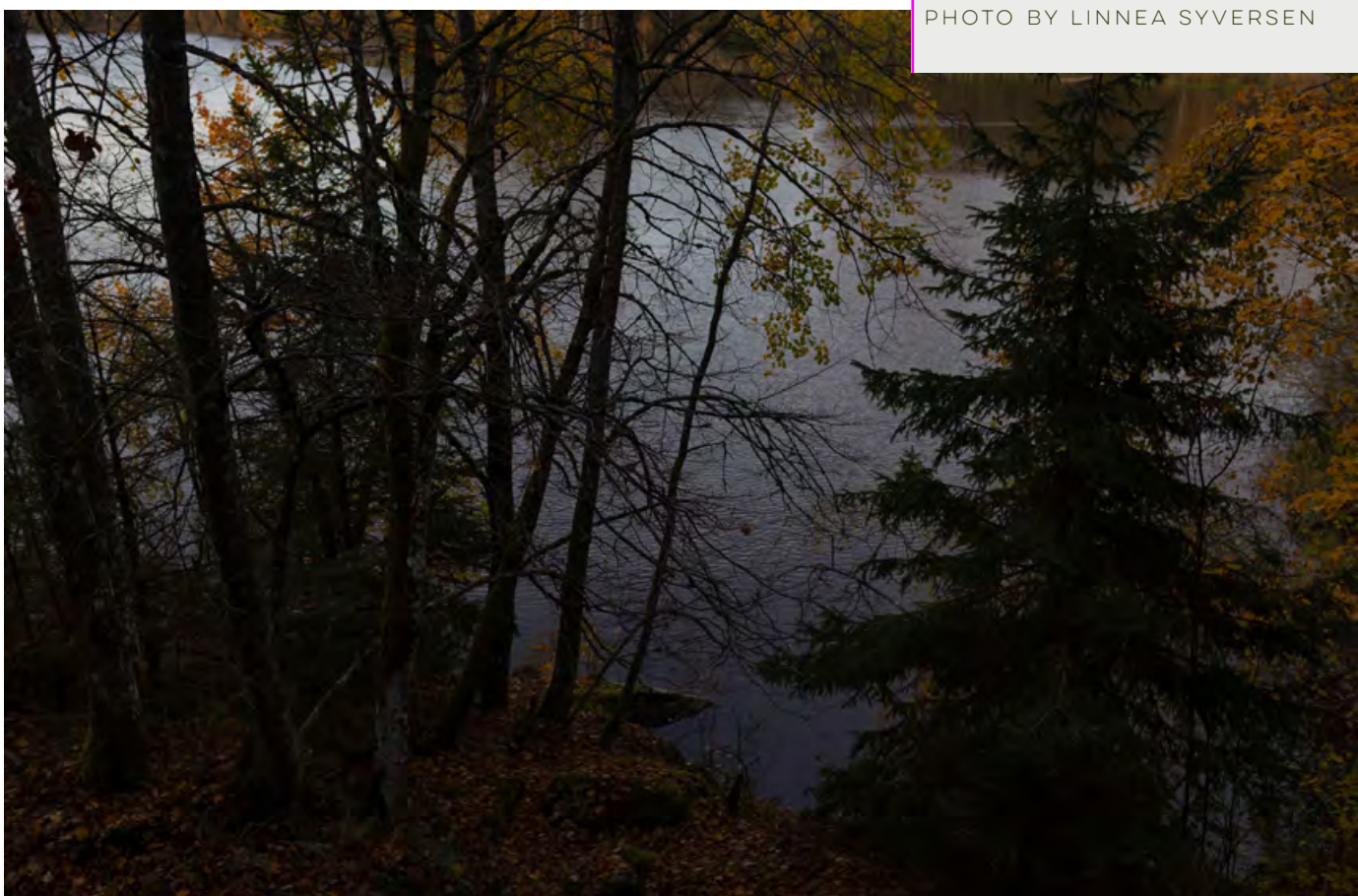
Norway: Biological Mosaics

In Norway (Ås and Østmarka National Park) we discovered a particularly rich biodiversity. The landscape can be described as a mosaic of different habitats, dominated by spruce and pine forests, complemented by elements of deciduous trees and various types of wetlands. This region is home to rare fungi and lichens, as well as animals such as beavers and wolves.

Cultural and historical context: Norway's relationship with its forests is deeply linked to local mythology. The artists involved in the project have drawn on site-specific narratives, such as the myth of the troll girl Herløg, which addresses the painful separation between humans and nature. The Norwegian landscape invites imaginings of mystical creatures and beings living beneath the earth's surface, transforming the physical ground into a "teeming universe" that transcends purely scientific observation.

All three of the forest ecosystems explored during "relating forests" shaped the artistic process through their ecological and cultural characteristics.

PHOTO BY LINNEA SYVERSEN



III.3 Multilinguism and Eco-Literacy

Multilingualism, which initially could have been perceived as a barrier to communication, became the key to deeper perception in our artistic work and in our workshops. We deliberately worked with several languages at the same time—Norwegian, German, French, mixed with English.

When words no longer convey information but become pure sounds, our attention shifts. We listen to the sound, not the words, and may even gain access to the deeper meaning of language. The foreign sounds opened the participants' perception to something new. These incomprehensible fragments of language act like magic formulas – they expand the mind because we cannot immediately classify them.

From Language Barrier to Environmental Connection

Struggling with language barriers mirrors our struggle to understand nature. Just as we learn to understand someone who does not speak our language, we also learn to "communicate" with trees and animals. When we accept that we do not have to understand everything in order to connect, we open ourselves up to a different form of perception – an ecological literacy that does not require translation into human words.

The Foreign as a Gateway

We thematized the difficulty of communicating in a foreign language at the very beginning of our exchange and allowed it to become a tool to open us up to the otherness of the more-than-human world. By learning to encounter each other without perfect communication, we also learned to encounter the forest in a new way—not as knowledgeable experts, but as learners open to the unknown.

The Power of Failure

As workshop leaders we deliberately spoke broken French or uncertain English. This encouraged the participants of the workshop to experiment and take risks. This deliberate failure breaks down hierarchies. No one can act like an expert when everyone is searching for words together. It creates a space where imperfection is welcome.

One artist reported that her limited English forced her to listen and observe more. This increased attention fundamentally changed her perception: she began to feel how to connect with other living beings without sharing a common language.

The Words We Use

Encountering different cultures, languages, and practices also made us aware of ethical issues. When talking about "living*" in the forest, for example, we need to choose our words carefully, as terms such as "nature" are deeply rooted in a dualistic, objectifying perception of the world. How can we define and name biodiversity, "green," "living*", and "more-than-human" without using words that affect our perception of the world? This questioning was an important step. Saying "nature" or "objects" perpetuates the alienation we seek to question. On the other hand, depending on the group, this naming can raise other issues: academic wording uncommon in everyday speech can exclude people who do not yet possess the same background knowledge. Using the terms like "living*" or "more-than-human" may alienate some listeners.

We concluded that it is necessary to take the time to find names together, especially in workshops. By doing so, we can remain responsive to each other. Renaming "nature" must be part of the journey.

III.4 Re-telling Myths

From Cognitive Reflection to Embodied Knowledge

One of the aims of 'relating forests' was to engage with narratives about forests, such as myths and fairy tales, and rework them. As previously mentioned this process began with reflection on the labels we use instinctively and their effect on our perception of the world. **This linguistic awareness extended to questioning provenance and authorship: where did these stories come from? Who wrote them? Who is doing the retelling?**

By inviting the audience to share their stories, ranging from personal experiences to tales, we aimed to capture the essence of the forest in people's imaginations: the cultural imaginaries* of the forest. After collective exercises to raise awareness, both children and adults told us their stories, helping us to delve into and understand the collective imaginary.

The incorporation of sounds from the forest – provided by eco-acoustician Lasse Marc Riek – extended an invitation to the more-than-human beings themselves to contribute to the narrative.

Our approach to deconstructing myths and fairy tales in this project is not text-based, but rather three-dimensional and experiential.

Initially, we explored myth theory on a cognitive level. For example we listened to lectures by theatre arts scholar Catherine Persing on myths and plant studies, Harald Gaski on Sami mythology, Historian Gefion Apel pointed out in her insights on language and german tales that those have often been used for educational and moral purposes. During the project we also engaged with local knowledge, such as that of Hårvard Steinsholt on myths themselves and with different foresters and forest specialists on eco-systems. Finally, we took a philosophical approach, guided by the work of Martin Lee Mueller and Austra Apsite. The process of deconstruction typically requires the identification of moralising attitudes and the experimentation with playful methods for embracing ambivalence.

However, our project's methodology involves a crucial shift from cognition and action to embodied knowledge — what Martin Lee Mueller calls 'teaming up with plants'. This is not a metaphorical collaboration, but rather a practice of sensing the shared vitality that connects all living beings and experiencing community beyond the human realm. This approach reveals how the forest begins to speak through attentive bodies and how plant life becomes an interlocutor and guide.

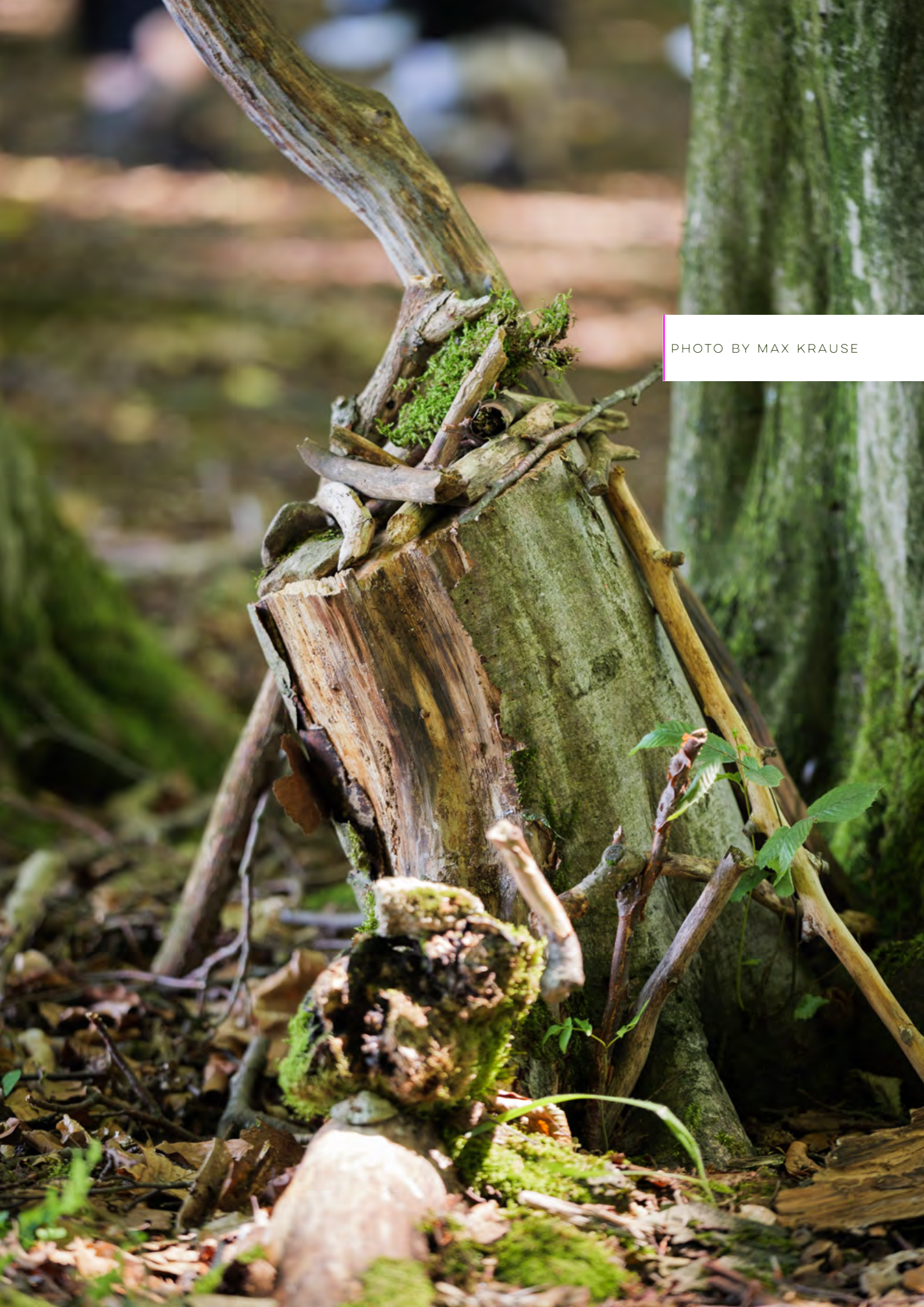


PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

Myths as Living Processes: The Forest's Own Dramaturgy

These findings invited us to avoid a linear approach when staging the myths, a decision that was further influenced by the fact that text analysis falls outside our area of expertise. The initial cognitive engagement is just the start: what then follows is the sensing of the temporal and local references, the uncovering of the mythical nature of the place. **Through seasonal transformations, the choreography of light and shadow, and the polyphonic soundscape of its many voices, the forest enacts its own dramaturgy.**

> "Deconstruction cannot only have to do with semantics, sentence structures and authorship. Can it be questioning the process and method of writing it, performing it? Can it be questioning how we tell it? Who is allowed to perform a myth and why? How do we respectfully deconstruct or alter it? What is the relationship between respecting and honoring traditions, memes and cultures and at the same time using critical thinking to look at outdated narratives that have outrun their purpose and may cause ruptures rather than bridges? How is the deconstruction of the myth related to the audience and the context in which it's being performed?" (Artistic Writing Rebekka Saeter)

The work oscillates between identifying what is (drawing on knowledge) and navigating chaos (embracing the unknown). This interplay between certainty and uncertainty is the condition of co-authorship with the forest.

This practice involves accepting what is there, breaking with romanticism in order to affect real change. This means establishing a permanent foundation while simultaneously becoming comfortable with fragility and instability. After all, forests emerge froma world of layers — minerals, plants, human, mushrooms, insects…— each operating according to different temporalities and logics.

As we've been reflecting with Martin Lee Mueller, the forest lacks a horizon. We are inside; we don't know what lies behind or above us. **By stepping in from the outside and creating a space for an empiricism of the body, we allow the forest to expand our imagination.** By contemplating plants, we recognise that material itself becomes meaningful.

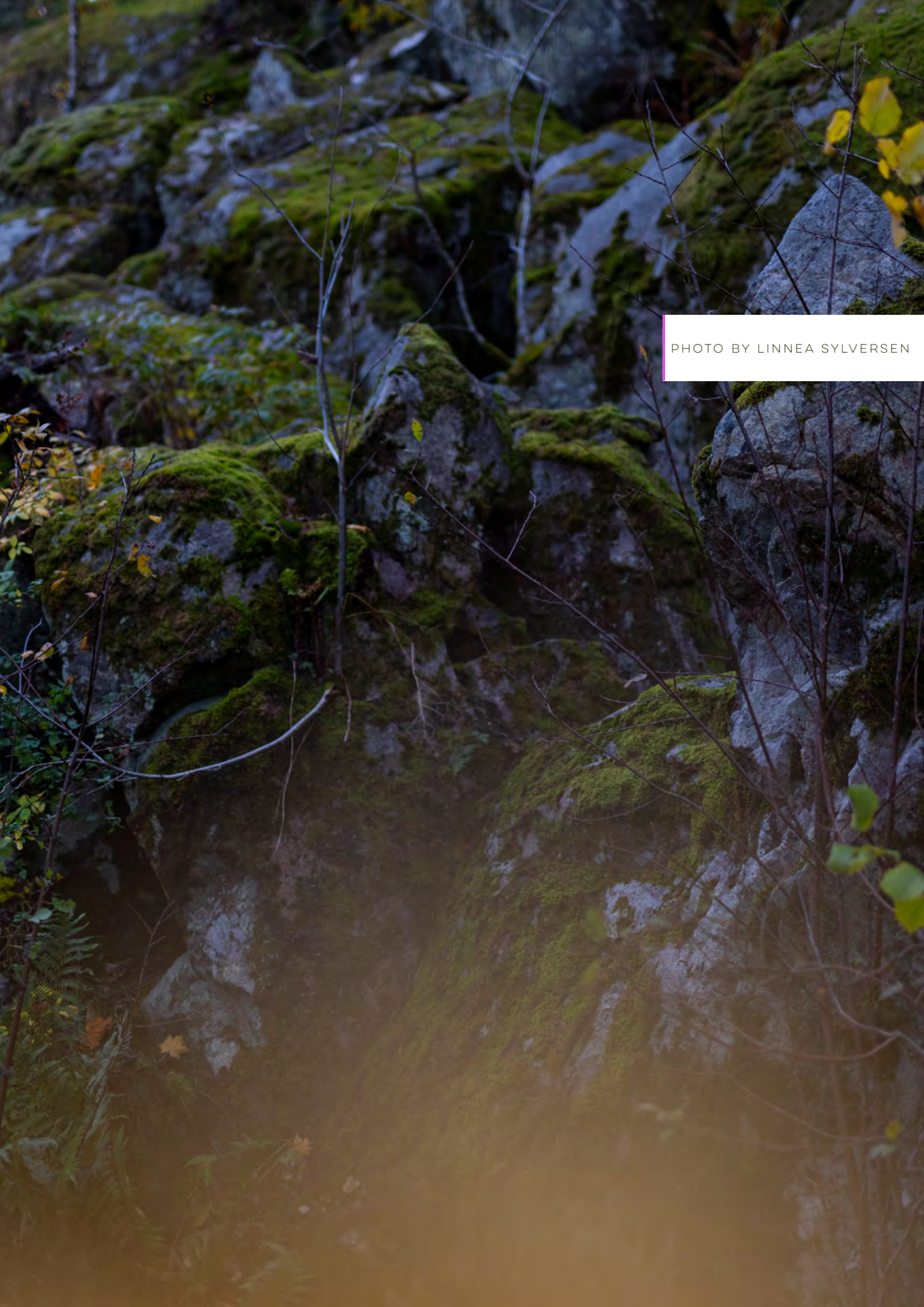


PHOTO BY LINNEA SYLVERSEN

Creating Resonance*: Practices of Listening and Availability

Austra Aspite pointed out that British storyteller Martin Shaw suggests that "myths are utterances — mythopoetic formations that emerge from the relationship between people and place." Drawing on Heidegger's concept of poiesis, we can understand myths as "the way things are born and still growing." Every world is a world in the process of being made; every myth is a living process rather than a fixed text.

Here, deconstruction is understood as an act of listening and availability
The myth manifests itself as soon as artistic gestures allow themselves to be shaped by the materials and beings of the place. The fundamental questions remained: How can we deconstruct or respectfully alter the myth? And how can we create conditions that enable and expand this relationship with the forest?

Working with the forest as a co-author means celebrating mysteries as openings for questions rather than problems to be solved.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

IV. ARTISTIC PRACTICES OF TRANSFORMATION / THE ECOLOGY OF PERCEPTION AND RESONANCE*

IV.1 Processes of Familiarisation and 'Becoming*' *Rebekka Saeter*

There are several theories and concepts that are helpful for us to use in this context. Because what *is* the process of familiarisation? What does it truly mean to *relate* to forests? The initial cognitive engagement is just the start: what then follows is the sensing of the temporal and local references, the uncovering of the mythical nature of the place.? "What are the ways in which we have related to forests in our project? How does doing so affect our work?"

I suppose it is worth mentioning that we can *relate* to forests in many different ways, we can practice *multimodal worldling* as it is described. There are indeed multiple ways people relate to forests.

But which are the ways of relating that create relationships, a sense of belonging? Which are the ways that invite us to care for humans and more-than-humans combined and that allow us to be in process or in learning and in development with a place, in a way where we can understand more and become closer and wiser.

What is it that we do physically, practically, that can be described with words, that are not just overarching concepts. And how do we use storytelling and myths and our artistic practices in doing this.

In our work, in this project we prefer talking about *places* rather than *nature* or *landscape*. We do not want to treat the forest as an empty site where we establish our project. The word landscape refers to the shape – the material topography – of a piece of land, but we do not live *in* them as Cresswell says we look *at* them. Talking about 'nature' creates the Cartesian split between nature and culture, which is also not helpful in our context.

There is much literature on how to define this word, *place* that I do not want to spend too much time getting into, but for our context we have been interested in definitions that talk about the multidimensional, interdisciplinary nature of places.

How are people and places mutually influenced by each other?

Place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world. So: what are the *place making activities,* behaviours or rituals we can engage in that can include a complexity of meaning making, relationships and stories that assist us in getting *a sense of it* – a feeling that we know what it's like to be there. (But also invites us into critical thinking of our actions or behaviours).

When working with places we thought it important to consider the place's *past, present and future.* In this context it involved doing research into myths, stories, maps, activities, local people and storytellers, anything from distant to recent history.

What are the current uses, who uses it and how does this affect the place and all the living* that are there? What might the place look like in the future, how does the place relate to space, to the larger area, to politics and land management or biodiversity protection?

In contextualizing our work with places, I have found it helpful to use Mannion's models to distinguish between learning or relationship building that is place-responsive and those that are not.

The first is called *place ambivalent,* which ignores place. An example is reading a random poem which has nothing to do with the place, people or history in which it is located.

A place sensitive poem might respond to local phenomena in general ways (like the lake or pine trees in the vicinity or birds flying by).

A Place essential poem draws directly on the specific historical, environmental, cultural events that have defined that place and would almost certainly have required the poet to have first-hand experience of it. (Ref Mannion)

Process of Becoming*

In order to reach place sensitivity we found that it is necessary to use a process of *becoming**

BECOMING-WITH*

"We become-with each other or not at all."

Our identities and existence is a result of our **ongoing relational entanglements**

becoming is always a process *in relation,* there is no isolated selfhood. (Haraway, 2016)

BECOMING (Deleuze Guattari)*

From *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), **Plate 1: Introduction: Rhizome:**

> "A becoming is never a general or collective becoming, but a becoming-animal, a becoming-woman, a becoming-imperceptible… It is not a question of imitating or identifying, but of participating in a continuous transformation."

As Chessa Adsit Morris writes in the *becoming Feral* publication;

becoming connotes the recurrent act of deconstructing boundaries between bodies, constructing malleable new edges in which both identities exist simultaneously – a continual performance of immanence and difference. Engaging in messy entanglements and allowing our ideas, thoughts, dreams, actions to become affected. To truly ask – what is the performative potential beyond observation and how do we reach it in the short time we have. (Adsit-Morris: 2022)

I think that both multisensory learning and conceptual understanding are necessary. But importantly: how does the place communicate or engage, how do the living beings speak and how do we listen and respond? In addition to considering the preparations above, we swam, slept, ate, sang, danced, made fires, wrote and played… all the while including the place and beings in all our active and passive activities, "What are the ways in which we have related to forests in our project? How does doing so affect our work?"

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

SITUATED KNOWLEDGE*

Situated knowledge means that all knowledge is **located** — it arises from particular places and is shaped by the relations and practices that produce it. This challenges notions of universal, objective knowledge and highlights the importance of context, perspective, and responsibility.

The American philosopher Dona Haraway emphasizes that being "situated" means **being present in the world where one acts and lives,** thus grounding knowledge in embodied, localized experience. (Haraway, 2016)

I imagine the process of becoming or familiarisation is much like soaking myself into something – physically that I am a porous being, like a sponge, and I bathe in a relationship with my spongy self and I expand through all of my limbs containing all the fluids and liquids and at the same time becoming part of the ecology of the water.

Or I imagine the process as myself picking blueberries. That after spending hours crouching down with my berry picker continuously slicing itself through the blueberry plants hearing the rolling sound of the berries, feeling the heaviness of the container filling up and slowly and steady my hands are becoming bluer, it's staining my clothes, my tongue, my nose is noticeably filling, saturating itself with the smell of moss and blueberry plants as if it was continuously literally sprayed into me. When I end my berry session I don't feel the same. And the berries are also altered, as I have stepped and squeezed and pushed and pulled all of them around, like wind, or snow, a smelly dog, or bird, but in a far more less gentle way, more like a bulldozer running through (without having the slightest desire to bulldoze anything).

That in knowing or experiencing something you become more understanding, you see or experience more depth, it becomes more 3-dimensional or even 4-dimensional to you, and it increases its meaningfulness to you because the complexity of something makes it more beautiful and you can relate to it with more of yourself, more aspects and layers of embodied experience.

IV.2 A Choreography of Attention // Threads in the Forest's Web

Marianne Cornil

Our bodies in the forest,

bones, flesh, skin, root networks, moss.

Carefully we seek an attuned interplay of auditory, physical, and haptic elements that understand the forest as an active partner.

We all breathe, grow, fill the space with sound and vibration. Our co-presence, human and more-than human, creates transformation.

Each sound, each touch and each step is a thread that weaves us into the web of the forest until the boundary between our own bodies and our surroundings becomes porous.

SILENCE

Silence that leaves and welcomes space.

Creating space.

For perception.

Space for the subtle sounds of the forest

—the whisper of the wind and birdsong.

Paying attention

as a form of reciprocity with the living world*,

in which gifts are received with open eyes and an open heart.

Can we allow it? For how long?

Even just for a minute

Conscious silence is key to resonance* and inner silence being created.

Sounds make the invisible audible.

They build an emotional bridge to the forest.

The sound of ants and the noises coming from the ground

stimulate the imagination and allow us

to experience the earth as “teeming with life.”

SOUNDS

Poems and songs resound.

In Norwegian, French, German, and English.

—with musicality and mysterious beauty.

Like spells.

From folk songs to lullabies, from humming to singing.

These sounds are created through dialogue with the forest.

In resonance* with the trees.

When artists use their voices to express the “song” of a tree, the wood becomes a communicating being.

> I stop near a diseased spruce tree, and maintain or prolong the ritual and transformation. I let the tree’s song come to me, as we did with Layla in the morning. Here, the sound coming from my voice is hoarse and crackling—very different from that of the young beech tree to which I had given my voice that morning.

TIME

Attuning to the place requires slowing down.

Take time.

Allow yourself to be swept up in
the surrounding temporalities.

Embrace the cycle of the seasons.

Immerse yourself in the sediment of the past.

and the promises that the place may contain.

It takes a certain amount of courage to slow down the process. Everyone slows down, wanting less in order to revisit what we already believe we know, so that we can discover together.

Understanding the forest as a breathing web of time

PHOTO BY LINNEA SYVERSEN

Walking through the forest is a choreographed experience.

You move over uneven paths and moss.

Immersing yourself in the world of the forest

Detached from everyday life.

Every step becomes part of a performance.

Walking together becomes a ritual hike.

WALK

Together we walked through the forest – over soft mossy ground, along a narrow path, over hill and dale, over the spring forest floor, under various trees, in spring meadows. We felt the coolness of the shade and the warmth of the sun on our skin, experienced the wind and clouds that pushed themselves in front of the sun. We were able to experience the forest with our senses.

TACTILE EXPERIENCE

Through physical contact we feel
the textures of the forest

We touch moss, bark, and leaves.

Experiencing the sensation of tactility.

rough, smooth, soft, or hard.

We sense the forest's gifts.

Passed around in a circle behind our backs,

Experience through our sense of touch

what the forest awakens in us and what it tells us.

Awakening our senses

through walking, breathing, meditation, swimming, running…

Paying attention to the textures of our browns, our flesh, our skin.

BODIES

Feel the air that enters and leaves our lungs.

Our Bronchies like the venetian of leaves, a branching pattern.

Air feeds each living being.

Getting to know your own body and vitality makes us receptive
to encounters with other living beings.

POETIK

By activating the senses, matter is poeticized.

Through intensive engagement with the place, the boundary between one's own self and the place momentarily dissolves

The mythical and the material become one

Between inside and outside, between oneself and the place between the present and mythical time, between the path of humans and the lake, between nature and culture—it is precisely there, in this interstice, that myth can occur. Each stage of this preparation, whether planned or fortuitous, is part of a poetic way of living. It is not a question of representing the myth but of creating the conditions for its appearance.

Poetry speaks directly to the human audience and the forest.

Poems draw attention to the beauty and "magical" quality of the surroundings.

Poetry creates "inner landscapes" in which myths and personal experiences merge.

A bridge between worlds.

Encountering this place invites the myth through the poeticization of materials and living things. It is through this attention to substances—the stone mingling with the earth, the moss enveloping it, the birch leaves scattered like drops of blood, the imagined sound from beneath the earth—that the myth finds its way into the tangible. All these sensory qualities create a poetic depth that allows the myth to take shape. The material is no longer simply decoration but becomes language: it carries within it a memory, almost an intentionality, which resonates with the mythical figures we summon.

IV.3 Co-creation with the Forest

Interview with Luzie Ackers and Marianne Cornil

How do you experience the forest as an active partner of the creation?
Without the forest, none of this would have been possible. The forest really is a collaborator, a co-narrator. In Norway, for example, when you walk through those mossy, damp forests, you feel like you're diving into a cave. The forest looks at you. And then there are those moments when the wind picks up just as we're talking about a storm, or when birds – finches, robins – enter into dialogue with us as we talk about bird life. The light at dusk becomes a dramatic element that reduces visual perception and draws your attention to other senses – hearing, touch.

How do you deal with this unpredictability?
It's a productive tension between what we plan and what the forest "offers." We have structures, but the artistic path is non-linear. You have to pay attention to the 'little wild plants' growing in the middle of the path. Our sketches and gestures are like little plants looking for the right soil, not fixed sequences of movements. And if birds don't sing when we expect them to, it is also an answer from the forest. Perhaps our presence has scared them away.

How does that influence your work at the moment?
I feel a growing need to design the creation process and collaborative work forms with more calm and with a different temporal scale. I want to make resonance* spaces larger, so that experiences may reverberate. It's about allowing the unplanned, the open, and not immediately covering it with the next activity.

It takes courage to slow down the process and 'want less' in order to discover new things together with the forest. Our walk in Norway, which was the final presentation of our work, was like a path that led deeper and deeper—both into the forest and into the imagination. We started with the poem, which initially stimulates the intellect into a different perspective. Then we heard something that drew us in further—recorded sounds. And so it went on and on, deeper and deeper. We used myths such as the figure of Herløg, the daughter of the troll king as a kind of 'mattress', as a framework – but we leave room for the emerging, for what arises from the situation. We had the first mask, which was still human. Then we moved on to the sounds of the underworld, and then came a mask in the twilight. This structure was like a gradual descent into a deeper immersion into the imagination.

Every step was a response to the forest, and the forest responded back.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

IV.4 Interconnections

Anne Bouchon and Anne-Claire Dromzee

Interconnections with the more-than-human can be enhanced by a deep exchange between participants through the co-creation of a story's narrative in a workshop or performance setting. Here we speak about interconnections, as an intensive exchange that takes into account the different aspects of the relationship, including the influence and the dependence on each other. By describing the relationship as an interconnection, we acknowledge the different qualities that make up the relationship.

During "relating forests" several forms of participatory storytelling were tested. The aim was to prepare the participants or audience to share their own stories of the place and/or their relationship with the "living*". This participation both enriches the narrative, and multiplies the transformation of representation proposed by the artists. This creates an interaction between the participants themselves, which falls within local collective memory. There too, the "artists" capacity to take into account the mental maps of the audience and to translate what has been shared in their artistic way, reinforce the transformative power: the artistic proposal is anchored in the existing imaginations of the participants. This improvised interaction increased the resonance between audience and artists and strengthen the link to the more-than-human.

Participative Storytelling

The leadership role of the artist during participative storytelling is to provide the starting point and contribute to the collective story-sharing. The artist invites the audience to cultivate their own imagination, stepping outside rational thinking and letting words flow.

This starting point can be a well-chosen tale, told in part or in full.

Transforming the spectator into an active participant in storytelling in the forest allows new narratives to emerge. Participants' creativity and inspiration are raised and enhanced by activities such as sensory exercises, touching plants, moments of human silence and active listening to the environment, periods of introspection and expanded awareness of our biological belonging.

Expressing emotions also played an important role.

Inviting participants to share personal stories with each other fostered connection. As the artists transformed these shared stories into art, participants where then able to see them from a different perspective and reflect together.

We experimented with sharing stories not just in the workshop, but also as a part of our performance. Once the audience had been brought into a state of connection with their feelings and imagination, they were ready to share stories and songs from their youth. Together, we created the piece in an instant.

Tales and Poems for Interconnection

It is possible to transform or strengthen participants' connection to the forest through carefully selected stories that appeal to the imagination and emotions.

By "carefully selected stories," we mean fairytales that, in addition to some poetry, feature non-human characters in the forest and a connecting symbolism. The forest and the trees do not merely serve as backdrops or landscapes, but appear as living beings in their own right, which (or who) deserve our respect. In these stories humanity's place is balanced with nature. The tree is the symbol of a living power. As Catherin Persing writes: "The stories we choose to tell today will influence our relationship with nature."

PHOTO BY LINNEA SYVERSEN

VI.5 The Mask Ritual as a Transformative Experience – Masks as Liminal Objects

Marianne Cornil

The ritual mask

giving human access

to their ancestors, to heaven and to the centre of the earth.

In the Alps and the Basque Country, in Portugal and in Bulgaria

Rituals connect humans to the living*,

Give them access to other forms of being,

Lifts dualities.

The mask—a threshold object, a mirror can awaken the poetry of the place.

PHOTO BY
LINNEA SYVERSEN

Preparation—Connecting with the Place

I sit on the leaf-covered ground,

listen to my heartbeat, then the earth.

Beneath: a network of roots, rock.

The lines connect.

A squirrel looks down at me from a bare branch,

Ratatoskr, the squirrel from Norse mythology

who climbs between the gods.

Connecting heaven and earth

His swing, a question mark in the branches

His gaze—warning or invitation?

Birch leaves red as drops of blood on the moss-covered ground

Soft in their power.

They show the path.

To feel this, to trace it, to make it tangible for others: this is where our work lies.

Beyond language and sometimes beyond explanation,

close to experience, unique to each person and each place.

PHOTO BY LINNEA SYVERSEN

Transformation – "Enhanced Gestures":

The mask – threshold and mirror for the inner and outer worlds

Always magical in its form. It waits to be embodied.

A dot between my eyebrows,

A dot between its eyebrows,

as if bringing it to life.

The mask: through its eyes, the shining lake.

I breathe in, close my eyes, open them again
as Herløg.

Encounter – Embodying the Landscape

From the ditch: visitors arrive, carrying small lamps.

A masked figure climbs out, moss under its soles.

She is not looking at the landscape—she is weaving connections, like a spider's web between all beings, large and small. And all of this – looks back.

A spectator later says: "Nature itself was looking at me."

Shift perspective.

The mask has totemic power, dissolving the anthropocentric view.

Herløg, the troll's daughter. Or the Hackesusa. Or the birch tree itself.
Or the lake.

The mask can embody all of this.

Another creature, whose colors blend in with those of the forest.

It emerges from ancestral tales, having passed through the rituals of thousands of peoples.

Its green tentacles draw residues of history from the ground.

Without eyes, mouth, ears, or skin, this being perceives the world in other ways.

People look at it and see their own projections.

An external image that awakens internal images, which in turn transform perception.

The mask makes visible what has always been there, gives access to the poetry of the environment.

Between runs: the song. Between breath and mask: the transformation. Between human and non-human: the threshold on which we stand.

Epilogue

Ratatoskr climbs up and down. The breath in the mask brings it to live.

We practise the transition by performing it.

Between actress and character, between workshop and performance, between now and mythical time—

There, in between, the mask weaves its web, connects,

and looks back.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

The artistic practices described above have been tested with participants and are intended to be delivered to a group, whether it be a group of children, teenagers, adults, or an audience of all ages, with the aim of supporting the individuals in these groups' resonance* with the forest. This chapter describes how we put our artistic proposals into practice.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

V.1 Mask Ritual – Application in Workshops

In our public workshops in France and Germany, we proposed "micro mask rituals" that offered participants the opportunity to experience a shift in perspective by wearing a mask. These rituals took place in the forest in France with adults and in Germany with young people. The participants' testimonies revealed that this experience fostered a transformation from an individual, casual relationship with the surroundings to an immersive, universal connection.

Modifying the View

> "The holes in the mask are so small that you have to concentrate on details that you didn't notice before."
> *Workshop participant in Boscodon*

A young German man said that with the mask he was wearing, everything was even more condensed, more concentrated, and that he focused even more on small individual details.

> "I had a very different view on the forest with the mask";
> "A broader and more focused view at the same time"
> *Yannick, Detmold*

Promoting Introspection

> 'Towards inner reflection'

Switch of Personality

> 'The neutral mask that lays us bare' ;
> "I felt like I wasn't myself and that I could have a new experience by putting on this mask."

Immersion to the Forest Experience, Switch of Boundaries

> "the boundaries between my being and the insects and plants were blurred. I felt part of a whole."

Switch of Perspective

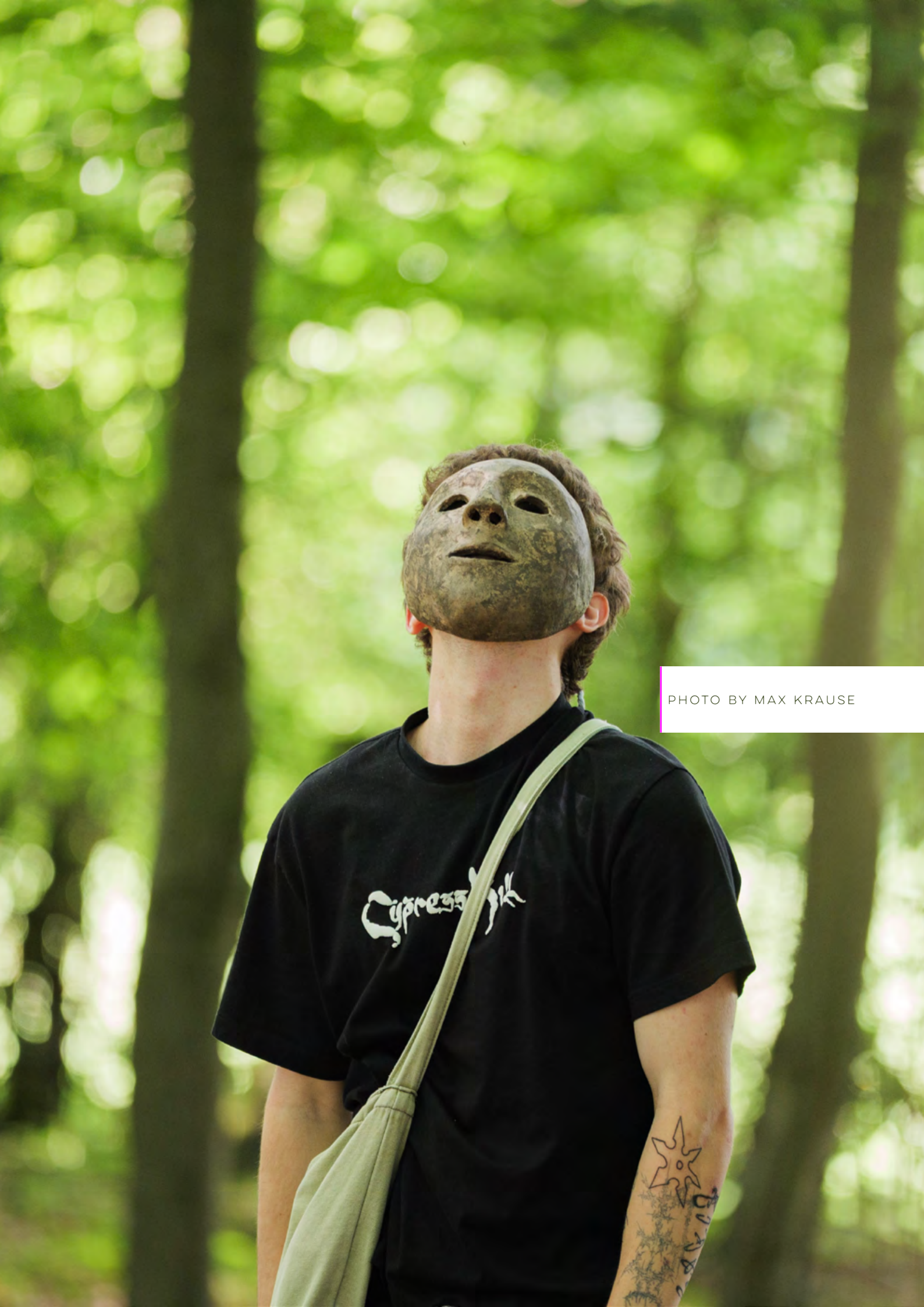


PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

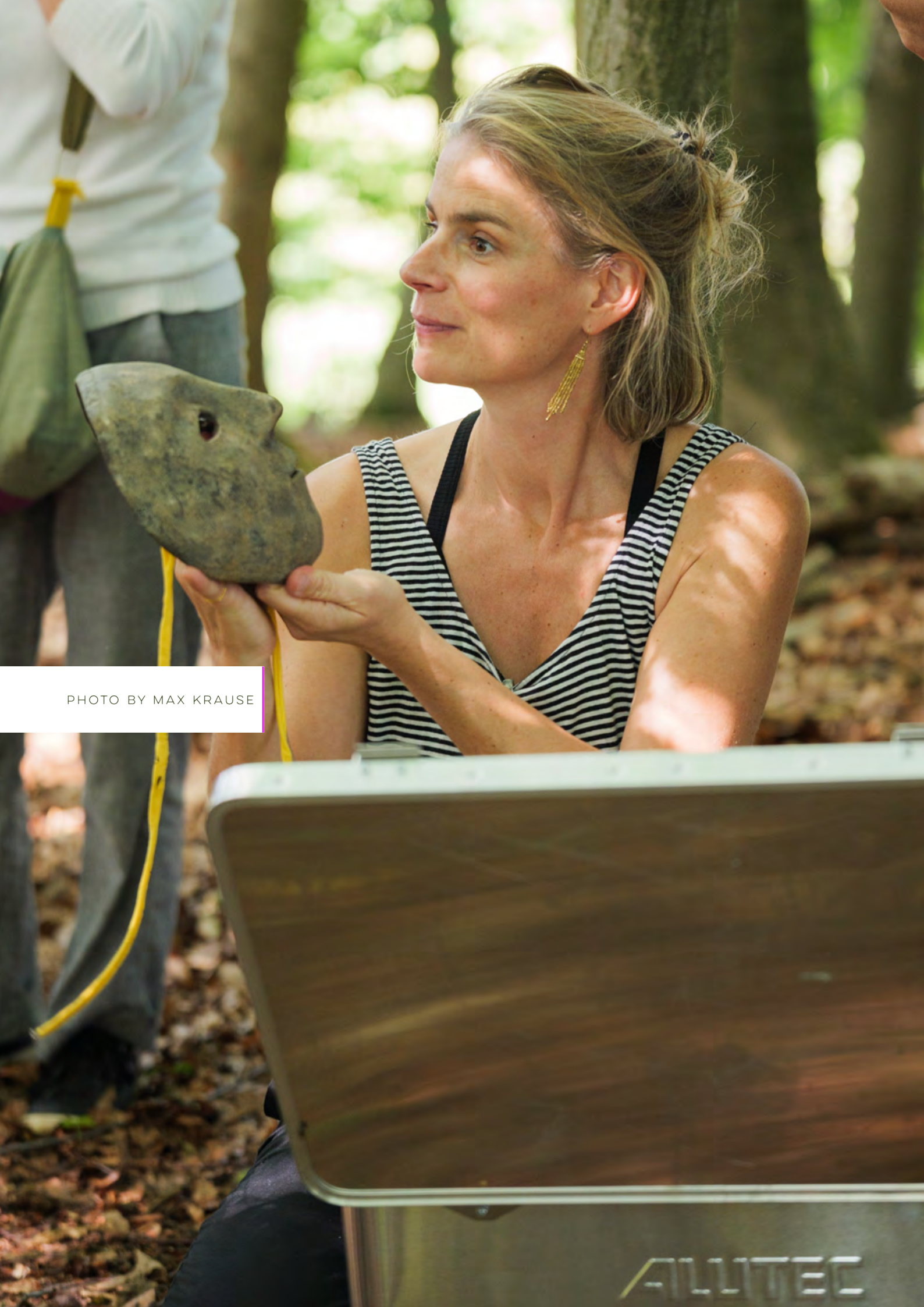


PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

Reception by Participants

Wearing the mask was the most popular experiential proposal in terms of transforming perceptions of the forest in France and Germany.

Participants described how their perception of the forest changed as a result of the restricted view provided by the mask, which they found extremely positive. French adult participants attest to their new sense of connection to the forest after the workshop, to "a different view with the mask"; "A broader and more focused view at the same time." A young German man said that, with the mask he was wearing, everything was even more condensed, more concentrated, and that he focused even more on small individual details.

They told us about a feeling of heightened introspection ("Towards inner reflection"), and even a switch of personality ('The neutral mask that lays us bare'; "I felt like I wasn't myself and that I could have a new experience by putting on this mask").

The mask purportedly helped them feel a shift in the boundary between humans and non-humans.

One adult participant said that the boundaries between his being and the insects and plants were blurred and that he felt part of a whole.

One adult participant expressed discomfort with the removal of the boundary between fiction and reality, as well as between humans and nature. However, she considered her discomfort and the questions and reflections that arose from it to be positive.

In Norway where one character of the performance wore the mask, one participant spoke to a particular moment he/she found impactful: "The forest creature with the mask that peeked out and seem to watch us so curiously, made me think about the forest and how it must find all the people wandering and fussing about are so strange."

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

PHOTO BY
MARIANNE CORNIL

V.2 Formats of an Artistic Proposal: Experiential or Receptive?

Luzie Ackers and Anne Bouchon

Our interest lies in the various roles participants can assume during an artistic proposal: from active engagement as workshop participants to at least physically more passive reception and contemplation as observers. The artistic and pedagogical formats span from experiential exercises to moments of concentrated perception, where participants observe and listen as witnesses to the unfolding events. This structure can be divided into two central modes: the experiential and the receptive. We observed that both modes can contribute to bring an audience into a state of resonance* with the place. This can be done through different mediums and in different ways. These are the responses from the audience to the impetus given.

In the experiential formats the focus was on joint action and social interaction within the group, with participants being encouraged to actively shape the experience and respond to each other. Such artistic offerings included, for example, cooperative storytelling, singing together, or mask play, in which the participants themselves wore masks. These experiences were often prepared or supplemented by sensory and meditation exercises.

In the receptive formats participants were given an artistic proposal that they activate through their all being, which impacts their emotions and imagination. Their positions were not passive, but receptive through perception.

During both the workshops and the performances the audience may have been in an experiential or receptive state. In our workshops in France participants were moved from one to the other by our artistic proposals. Proposing an experiential state during a performance remains an axis of work for further developments.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

V.3 Examples of Experiential Exercises

We would like to go into more detail about various exercises here. First, however, it must be said that the exercises cannot be viewed in isolation, but only in the context of the preparatory and follow-up phases.

Within our project the workshop groups consisted of people of different ages and experience levels with diverse needs, interests, and potentials. Many exercises required intensive preparation in order to adequately prepare participants for the various requirements—be it increased sensory sensitivity or a pronounced sense of community mindfulness.

When you arrive at a place—for us, always in the forest— you need to approach the space, the history, and the more-than-human inhabitants of the place. Over time we have gotten into the habit of asking the place for permission to work in that specific space.

The workshop must therefore be designed from the outset to take these needs into account and create a safe, supportive environment.

The participants affirmed that the experience gave them the ability to listen to the trees, to feel even more calm through concentration, to be someone else while in the forest. One participant shared: “Taking the time to slow down helps you reconnect with the place.”

1. Meeting with Plants

One of the central exercises we developed was “Meeting with a Plant”, which seeks to bring participants into contact with a plant. Meeting with the Plant is a mindful perception exercise in which you enter into direct sensory contact with a plant. Depending on the size and nature of the plant, the contact can be very subtle or more physical – for example, by leaning against it, placing your weight on it, or hugging it. This connection gives rise to an inner communication: you listen to the rhythm of the plant and ask it inwardly about its characteristics, its qualities, and its history. You explore your own relationship with this plant. The encounter takes about 10–15 minutes. Afterward, you consciously say goodbye to the plant and share your experiences with the group.

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IMPULSTANZ
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2. Blind Leading

Another exercise we experimented with at various moments was blind leading.

Two people come together and form an attentive pair. One person takes on the role of the guide, while the other closes their eyes and becomes the blind participant. The guiding person places one hand gently between the shoulder blades of the blind participant. This contact is calm and clear and serves as a subtle form of communication.

At the beginning, both take a moment to arrive together, attuning to each other's breathing rhythm. From this shared presence, the guiding begins. The hand on the back becomes a language: gentle, central pressure means moving forward. Pressure on the left side leads to the right, pressure on the right side leads to the left. When the guiding hand lifts slightly, the blind participant moves backwards.

In this way, the blind participant is guided through the forest—over roots and stones, across different ground textures, with small changes of direction and pauses. As vision moves into the background, space opens for other forms of perception. Attention shifts to the feet and their contact with the ground, to balance, movement, and bodily sensation. Sounds of the forest, scents, air movement, temperature, and the atmosphere of the place become more noticeable.

The forest is no longer perceived primarily through sight, but through touch, hearing, smell, and the felt sense of being in the living*. This shift in perception allows for a more immediate, embodied connection with the environment and cultivates a refined sensitivity to details, transitions, and spatial qualities.

From time to time, the guiding person may offer brief moments of seeing through a small signal—a gentle tap on the shoulder. One tap invites the eyes to open briefly; another tap signals closing them again. These moments function like small photographs: short visual impressions of light, form, or particular details in the forest, complementing the sensory experience without taking it over.

After an agreed period of time, the roles are naturally exchanged, allowing both participants to experience being guided with closed eyes as well as guiding with attentive presence. In this way, the exercise creates a shared experiential space in which the forest can be explored from different perspectives and with heightened sensory awareness.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

3. My Name – Plant Name

This is an exercise for the beginning of a workshop. All participants stand in a circle. The exercise is particularly suitable as a getting-to-know-you activity and can be used with children, young people, or adults, although it has proven especially effective in work with children. Each person chooses a plant name that starts with the same letter as their own first name. One after another, participants introduce themselves by combining their real name with the chosen plant name and adding a self-selected movement. The whole group then repeats the name, the plant name, and the movement together. In this way, participants get to know each other playfully, expand their knowledge of different plants, and at the same time come into movement and connect with their bodies. The activity creates a joyful, light atmosphere and is especially well suited as an energizing start to a workshop or a shared group session.

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

V.4 Reception in a Performative Format

In contrast to all the experiential exercises, the receptive formats allow for a role as an observing witness, which enables a deep sensory, emotional, and intellectual engagement.

In Norway this was implemented through a ritualized structure in the form of a performative forest walk at dusk, during which the group moved through the forest together and stopped at various stations. This walk took place at a slow pace and involved all age groups. The walk was designed as a mosaic-like narrative with mythical elements, singing, and sounds. A decisive moment was the appearance of the mystical characters, who appeared as masked figures without words or sounds.

This form of artistic performance deeply impressed the participants and enabled them to take on the perspective of the forest, which in turn can be imagined to observe people. The ritualized setting and the silence as these masked figures appeared allowed participants to fully engage with the perception and the events and immerse themselves in the mystical space.

The reactions showed that the participants felt a strong connection to the experience. The form of perception described as “observing” was described as particularly intense, connective, and meaningful.

V.5 Group Dynamics and Attention

Interview with Rebekka Saeter

What conditions are necessary for a group to truly pay attention?

One thing is trust. I think it matters whether people are present, and whether the expectations and intentions are on the same page. There needs to be a kind of settled energy, an open space for there to be any sort of listening or understanding. If you're uncomfortable or afraid or dealing with conflicts, there is not so much room for listening because then you're just finding solutions or fixing problems.

How does human connection relate to our ability to connect with the more-than-human world?

I realized how important the basic connection between humans is to make it possible to have a sensorial experience of relationship with the more-than-human. I think about the Maslow pyramid of needs—you need to feel safe, you need to feel seen and that you are not hungry or in pain. If you are in any of those categories, it's very hard to have other types of input. Maybe there is something similar with the more-than-human—that both have to say yes to the deal of communication, and in order to do that, you have to listen.

How did your relationship to forest develop through the project?

Something I've become aware of is how much my own level of comfort affects how I spend time somewhere. I wonder if there is a need to use a bit of time to become comfortable with the unfamiliar and the unknown, physically and sensorially. When you stay with something and you spend time getting to know what it is and how it smells and what it feels like, you start to like it in a different way and you build a relationship with it. Relationship building isn't always comfortable in the process, but it's always very meaningful.

PHOTO BY
CAMILLE FOUCAULT

VI. EVALUATION OF EFFECTS ON THE AUDIENCE

Anne Bouchon

Shall it be through experiential or receptive experience, through approaches that allow for direct experimentation (body, sensory experience) and approaches that go beyond our direct sensory experience and appeal to our imagination, the goal of our artistic proposals was to transform the link to the more-than-human of the population, and providing them the conditions of a resonance* state.

In this goal, we collected the feedback of the participants of the workshops and the audience of the performance.

VI.1 Collection Methods

We used several methods to interview them:

PHOTO BY MAX KRAUSE

Feedback form on forest imaginaries

Project Name: "relating forests"

Project name: relating forests

Date:

Location: Workshop in _____

Artistic proposals: _____ _____

Introduction

This activity is a workshop inviting participants to exchange their views on the forest — between reality and imagination — through artistic experiences. It is part of the European project Relating Forests, supported by the Creative Europe programme.

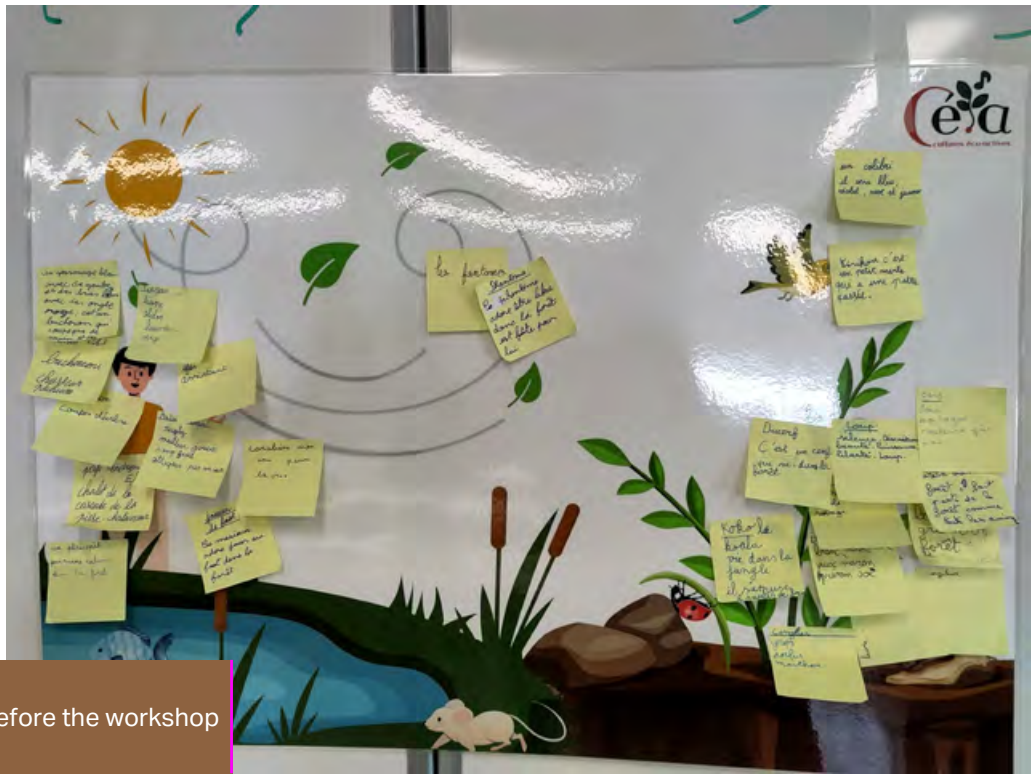
1. Please place a sticker to indicate the main emotion you felt during the workshop.
2. What touched you the most during the workshop? When?

3. What is your connection to the forest now? Write your answer on a sticky note and place it on the board. Please elaborate below: When did you feel it ?

Printed on recycled paper

1. A Frontal method which consisted of asking participants directly about their transformation, using written questionnaires provided at the end of the artistic proposal ('Has your relationship with the forest changed during the workshop, when and how?'; "Have you gained any new thoughts about this forest – or about forests in general – after the experience?')

   We also asked this question orally (in Germany) (young people whose perception and/or relationship with the forest had changed as a result of the workshop exercises were to sit down, while everyone else remained standing; the answer 'partially' could be indicated by bending the upper body.)

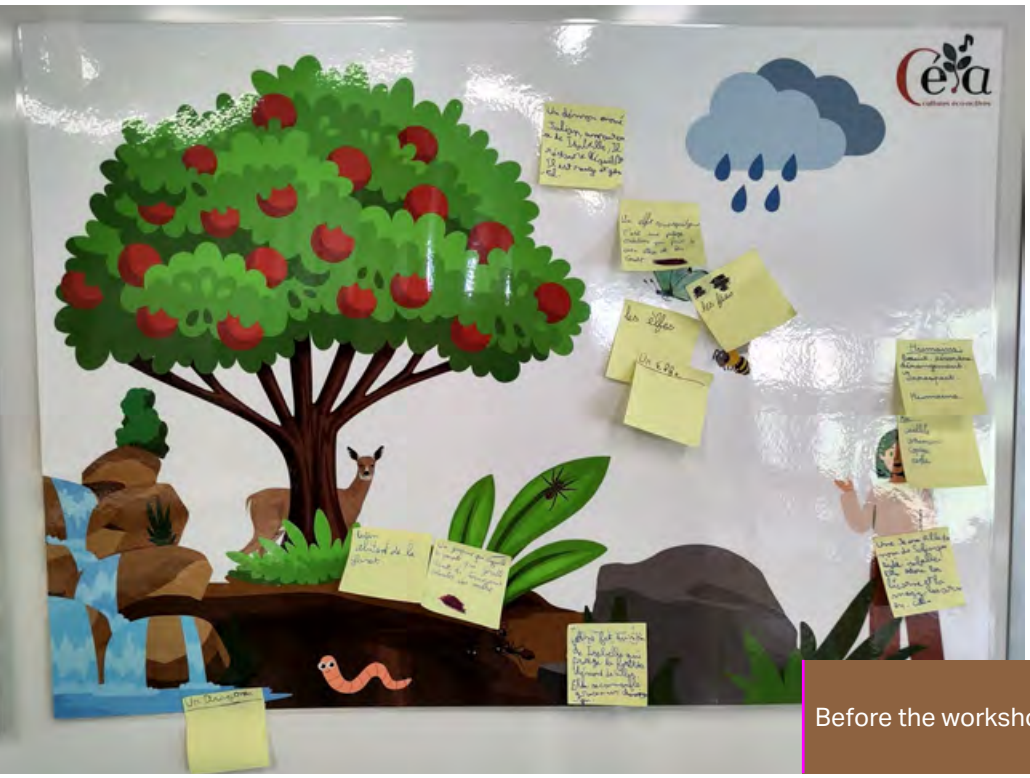


Before the workshop

After the workshop

2. Indirect methods, with a “before” and “after workshop”:

– In France, types of links to the forest were defined based on a free text written by schoolchildren on this subject; then the participants selected their links to the forest by placing a post-it note on a wheel of connections, before and after the workshop.

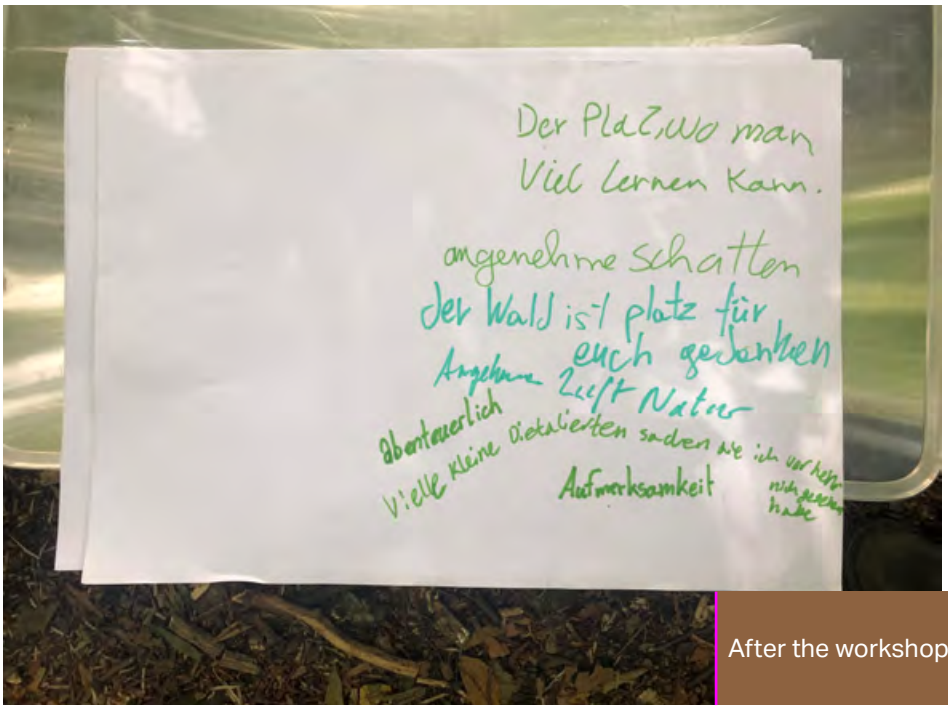


Before the workshop

After the workshop

– Schoolchildren in the workshops in France wrote short stories set in the forest; the characters in these stories were represented in the form of post-it notes on posters, before and after the workshop.

Before the workshop



After the workshop

– In Germany, the young people participating in the workshop were asked to provide terms and associations for the forest before and after the workshop.

VI.2 Qualitative Results

Perception Changes

We observed changes in perceptions of the forest thanks to the workshops we offered.

– In the children's imaginaries, the forest ecosystem became a place where non-human beings live: between the first collection and the one after the workshop, the characters in the stories told by the children changed from mainly human or fantastical figures to mostly animals.

From 17 boy heroes and 7 girl heroines, and 7 magical characters, we moved on to mainly mammals, with only 3 magical characters remaining and 5 humans. (The children also mentioned 2 trees, 3 birds, 2 mushrooms, 1 snail and 1 slug.)

– The young Germans develop a body awareness of the forest: described before the workshop as an image, a 'calm' and 'beautiful' place, it becomes "pleasant", associated with 'awareness'.

– The Norwegian public (including the children) shares their sensory experience: the light and sunset, the sounds and wind, and how they interact ('A fantastic moment between light and darkness, where the wind sings its melody in the tree branches.' 'I noticed the interaction between sound and light. How my senses influence my experience of the forest.')

Relationship Changes

Beyond perception, the relationship with this forest has changed in its function:

– For young people, from a place of leisure activities (barbecuing,' 'camping,' 'relaxing,') and habitat for animals, it has become a place of positive interaction, where one can learn and think ('the forest is a place for you a nd your thoughts', 'lots of small details that I hadn't noticed before').

– For schoolchildren in France, the function of use is also changing: from mainly using the place for their needs ('I play and move around' and 'I use what nature offers me' (in the context of hunters) or even self-affirmation ('I feel strong'), some children move on to a relationship of well-being and complicity ('I feel good', 'we are alike') (6 fewer and more, out of 37 questionnaires).

– Adults in Norway will visit the forest in another way after the performance (69 % of the questionnaires).

Belonging and Resonance*

Children's feeling of belonging to the forest ('it's my home') in France decreases after the workshop, perhaps due to a greater awareness of the more-than-human life in the forest.

Before the workshop with adults in France

After the workshop with adults in France

Among the adults surveyed in France, this sense of belonging ('my life', 'my natural space') was widely expressed at the outset; this tendency also diminishes, as with children, and is replaced by a tendency towards rejuvenation (joy, calm, serenity, rest), reflecting a certain resonance* as the relationship with the forest at the same time changed their inner state and increased openness.: 'filled with forests'; 'connected to the moment, the forest, others'; 'open'.

This resonance* is also found among adults in Norway. 'This walk gave me inner peace'; «the forest is more alive to me now and speaks to me .. tells magical stories, not just to kids but also to adults».

The young people in Germany showed signs of resonance* as well: they changed their behaviour, the way they moved, the way they interacted with the surroundings and others.

– Some participants had a professional link to the forest at the outset: these individuals reported that their perspective had changed and that they had discovered a different kind of link to the forest.

Multilinguism and Perception

Multilinguism has been appreciated by the participants in France and Norway. One participant in Norway "would have wished for more German and French" in the performance.

They confirm it opens to new ways of perception: "The atmosphere and stories worked well even if you did not understand what was said." It was "nice", "beautiful", "fun", "thrilling", "unifying", "special"...

VI.3 Quantitative Results about Connexion to the Forest

Among young Germans, 17 out of 20 reported that their perception of or relationship with the forest had changed after the workshops.

In France, 8 out of 12 adults said they had changed (5 people) or strengthened (3 people) their connection to the forest thanks to the workshop. 3 people spoke of positive continuity.

In Norway, 13 out of 15 respondents said they felt 'attached' to the forest after the performance (*10 very attached, 3 quite attached*). 4 out of 5 children answering the questionnaire think differently about the forest after the performance.

Initial link to the forest of french adults participants.

Link to the forest of french adults participants after the workshop.

VI.4 Some Observations about Emotions

In France, after the workshop in the forest, most pupils feel peaceful, happy and free. Deceived or frustrated pupils are pupils who would have better liked playing. Some are surprised or astonished.

Among the adults, the dominating emotion during the day is “happiness”, in all its forms, with some “surprised”– which can be seen as a sign of the innovation of the day. Some emotions could be seen as a favorable state to “resonance*” with the forest: “open”, “loving”,”inspired” or “peaceful” (6 answers out of 15 after the mask workshop ; 9 answers out of 13 after the participative fairytale walk).

In Norway, participants testify to overall strong and quite strong feelings of calmness, and to a lesser degree, kinship and joy.

VII. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Our team comes from different cultures and artistic backgrounds, all of us working in the performing arts. Exchanging ideas and collaborating with artists who have different approaches, along with bringing in scientific research and body-related practices, gave us the opportunity to explore the forest-human relationship from many different perspectives.

This multidimensional approach helped us to build relationships and resonate with each other and the place, as did interacting with workshop participants and audience members.

At the beginning our joint work was still fragmented; mask work and narrative walks took place separately from each other. Once we had become familiar with our respective arts, our practices merged into a more fluid process. Our approach was to allow things to evolve as processes, relationships and creations.

To make the complexity of the forest tangible we took advantage of the permeable nature of disciplinary boundaries.

We expanded the spectrum of storytelling possibilities. We incorporated recorded and natural sounds of the forest, making the forest a 'co-narrator' and providing the audience with an additional perspective.

Our exploration of myths and mask rituals revealed that they act as a bridge between human culture and the non-human world. They create liminal spaces where transformation becomes possible. We identified this transitional space as a productive area where new perceptions and perspectives can emerge, allowing new pathways to grow out of a state of chaos and uncertainty. We learned to welcome this state of transition as a practice in itself, embracing the unknown.

During our artistic process a number of principles guided our collaboration. These principles include: the processes of 'becoming*' and immersion in the place, multilingualism as a gateway to complexity, valuing silence, paying attention to group dynamics and needs, including deep time, and allowing a place's tales to emerge.

Working in and with the forest raised our awareness of the biological similarities between humans and other organisms in nature, for example in terms of life cycles, fundamentals, needs, and dependencies.

Gradually a collective method arose that facilitated resonance* with the artistic proposal by appealing to both cognitive and physical experience.

Resonance* goes beyond the purely aesthetic experience—it encompasses identification with a place that goes beyond a simple visit or documentation and involves a material, acoustic, and formal dialogue with the forest itself. Throughout the process we relied on feedback from audiences about our proposals in order to assess to what degree they facilitated a resonance* state with the forest, whether through sensory perception, emotion or (cultural) imaginaries. Inviting audiences to become agents of their own transformation through experience or reception, and through interactive participation, was also a main area of focus.

We wish to emphasize that listening is the most valuable prerequisite for resonance*. Listening – to oneself and others, and to ambient sounds, different ideas and practices, as well as the collective breath – and embracing the unknown are the most effective "tools"we have gleaned from this experience..

Our shared experiences in the forest have fostered deep and lasting artistic relationships. We are looking forward to drawing on the experiences and insights gained during this shared journey in our upcoming work.

VII.1
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RELATING FORESTS
FRANCE

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Project Officer: *Laura Cuesta*

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Graphic design, Technical management & support, Press: Camille Foucault

RELATING FORESTS
GERMANY

RELATING FORESTS
NORWAY

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APPENDIX

Definitions of important concepts

(Rebekka Saeter and Marianne Cornil)

A few key terms were important in establishing common ground among the project participants. It is important to have clear definitions, as the understanding of certain terms can differ depending on the language. Certain terms are very common in one language or group, but not at all unusual in others. Failure to take the time to ensure we are all on the same page can lead to major misunderstandings.

RESONANCE*

"resonance is a kind of relationship to the world, formed through affect and emotion, intrinsic interest, and the expectation of self-efficacy, in which subject and world are mutually reached and transformed."
— Rosa 2019, p. 174

resonance occurs when we are genuinely touched by the world and feel capable of reaching back, creating a relationship of mutual responsiveness and transformation rather than instrumental control or alienation. The term is borrowed from physics, referring to vibrations between the receptive subject and the object.

THE LIVING WORLD* /the living, "le vivant"

We translate the French term 'le vivant' as 'the living' or 'the living world'. This refers to the entire realm of living beings and life processes, encompassing humans, animals, plants, fungi, microorganisms and the dynamic relationships between them. It is not a static backdrop, as is often implied by the term "nature", but an active, generative force.

We prefer this term to "nature", which historically has positioned the non-human world as separate from humanity — a resource to be managed, a wilderness to be preserved or a romanticised 'other'. This creates a dualism: culture (human, civilised, active) versus nature (non-human, wild, passive). This aligns with contemporary ecological and anthropological thought, including the work of French scholars such as Bruno Latour, Baptiste Morizot and Vinciane Despret, which seeks to recognise the agency and subjectivity of non-human beings, as well as the interdependence of all living systems.

CULTURAL IMAGINARIES*

In the project, we used the term 'imaginary' to refer to the French term 'l'imaginaire'. This nuanced concept refers to a collective unconscious system of beliefs, symbols and shared cultural representations that shape how groups understand the world.

In this report, we used the term 'cultural imaginary' — a shared reservoir of symbols and meanings that shape group worldviews — and 'imaginary' or 'representation' to translate 'l'imaginaire'.

ODDKIN
"Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin, that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all."
— Haraway 2016, s. 4

KINSHIP, STORY and NARRATIVE
"It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what worlds make stories, and what stories make worlds."
— Haraway 2016, s. 12

RESPONSE-ABILITY
«a relational capacity to respond … to build, to imagine, and to find out together in ways that enhance and amplify one another's capabilities»

Haraway attaches it to practices as "sympoesis making-with" *staying with the trouble* in collaboration with others.

SITUATED KNOWLEDGE
Situated knowledge means that all knowledge is **located** — it arises from particular places and is shaped by the relations and practices that produce it. This challenges notions of universal, objective knowledge and highlights the importance of context, perspective, and responsibility.

Haraway emphasizes that being "situated" means **being present in the world where one acts and lives**, thus grounding knowledge in embodied, localized experience. (Haraway, 2016)

BECOMING-WITH
"We become-with each other or not at all." Our identities and existence is a result of our **ongoing relational entanglements** *becoming* is always a process in relation, there is no isolated selfhood. (Haraway, 2016)

BECOMING (Deleuze Guattari)
From *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), **Plate 1: Introduction: Rhizome:**

> "A becoming is never a general or collective becoming, but a becoming-animal, a becoming-woman, a becoming-imperceptible… It is not a question of imitating or identifying, but of participating in a continuous transformation."

DWELLING* (Haraway / Heidegger)
Dwelling is **being present in the "thick now"**, living among others (human and non-human) in unfinished, entangled configurations of place, time, matter, and meaning.

It is **not a safe, comfortable state** but entails *staying with* and enduring the complexities and troubles where we actually are. (Haraway, 2016)

DWELLING (Ingold)
to **be in the world,** not merely to have a place to live.

living, sensing, and developing skills through the body's engagement with the environment.

Ingold contrasts this with a **"building perspective"** where the world is first thought of and then acted upon. Instead, dwelling implies knowledge arising through continuous, embodied involvement. (Ingold, 2000)

EMBODIED PRACTICE (Ingold)
Skills and knowledge are **not abstract representations,** but are developed through the **body's active engagement** with the world.

This involves *practices that are embodied* through experience and work in context.

He links this to the concepts of *skill* and *dwelling* as lived, sensuous, and ecological processes. (Ingold, 2000)

SOURCES
Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016)
Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (2000)

MULTIMODAL WORLDLING
the ways beings (human and non-human) **co-create worlds using multiple modes or forms of expression and interaction** —such as language, movement, sensory engagement, art, technology, and material practices.

"Multimodal" emphasizes that these processes are **not just verbal or cognitive,** but embodied, material, and mediated across diverse channels (sound, gesture, affect, visuality, etc.).

SYMPOIETIC THINKING
Definition:
Sympoietic comes from Greek roots meaning "making-with" or "co-creation." **Sympoietic thinking** is an approach that centers on **collective, co-constitutive processes** where multiple agents (human and non-human) actively *create together.*

- Coined and popularized in feminist new materialism and ecological thought (including Haraway), sympoiesis contrasts with autopoiesis (self-making).
- It emphasizes **distributed agency, relationality, and mutual shaping**— no single actor fully controls outcomes.
- Sympoietic thinking is a way to conceptualize living systems, social worlds, and ecological entanglements as emergent, collaborative, and dynamic.

PHOTO BY
CAMILLE FOUCAULT

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